

THOUGHTS FOR CHRISTIANS,

SUGGESTED BY THE CASE OF

PASSMORE WILLIAMSON:

A Discourse preached in the Fourth Cong. Church,

HARTFORD, CONN.,

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OCTOBER 7, 1855.

HARTFORD, CONN.:

PRESS OF MONTAGUE & CO., 220 MAIN ST.

1855,

DISCOURSE.

ACTS XVI: 35—37.

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, 'Let those men go'. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul. 'The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore, depart, and go in peace.' But Paul said unto them, 'They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.'

It is no new thing in the history of the world to find a good man in prison. So often, indeed, has such an event occurred, that the natural presumption against a man's character caused by imprisonment, has been greatly weakened. The very first book of Scripture, and the oldest writing in existence, with the possible exception of the book of Job, contains an account of the unjust imprisonment for about fifteen years, of the pure-minded Joseph; and from that day to the present, the prisons of earth have been honored by the presence of prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers in church and state, and saints of every name and nation.

But while we are thus prepared to find Paul and Silas incarcerated at Philippi, the text in giving the conclusion of their experience, presents us with the singular spectacle of prisoners refusing to quit their cell. The magistrates command the door to be thrown open, and the jailer bids

the prisoners come forth; but the latter absolutely decline, except upon a most note-worthy condition. What is the explanation? Have Paul and Silas become enamored of confinement, and ambitious of martyrdom? Has a sudden fit of obstinacy seized them; a mulish perverseness which rejoices to oppose every thing which the magistrates may command? Are they indulging a feeling of resentment, and proposing to humble the magistrates for supposed misconduct? No : none of these suppositions tallies with the facts of the case, or with the established character of Paul and his companion. There was never a man more free from a factious spirit than Paul, nor would he ever offer needless opposition to any person or any measure. He was upon principle and habitually, patient, forbearing, placable and yielding. If on the present occasion he was firm and unbending, there must have been a just, sufficient and peculiar reason. And this reason he frankly declares. He claims that his imprisonment has been in gross violation of law; that he had committed no offence against the state; that he had been seized and publicly beaten, contrary to his rights as a Roman citizen, before conviction of any crime; that without a shadow of legal authority for such an outrage, he had been thrust into a dungeon, thus being branded by an official act, done before all the city, as a felon; that now the magistrates, recovering from excitement and becoming conscious of their injustice, send a private message to the jailer, to open the prison doors and allow the prisoners quietly to leave, thus hoping to escape merited odium and leaving Paul and his companion under unretracted charges. Paul was indignant at the meanness of this measure. He saw the aspersion that would remain upon his own reputation. He knew, likewise, that similar injustice might be inflicted upon any other citizen, and probably would be,

if the magistrates were allowed to escape without an acknowledgement of their illegal violence. Therefore, he spurned liberty which could be obtained only by dishonor; and though at Damascus he did not object to avoid imprisonment by an nocturnal escape over the wall, yet at Philippi he refused to walk out of prison in open daylight by consent of the authorities. He had no false pride, he would not raise a quibble, but he saw clearly a point of true honor and he maintained firmly his civil rights. He would not leave the prison in any way which implied submission to a false charge, or which seemed to be a concession of mercy and not of justice on the part of the magistrates. As they had publicly and by their own act adjudged him to the dungeon, they must with similar publicity and in an equally official manner, command his discharge as an innocent person. On that condition he would leave, but upon no other.

Here, now, was a dilemma for the judges—to maintain their fancied dignity and allow Paul to remain in prison; or to retreat from their false position, at the expense of a little pride, and order his discharge in the appropriate manner. If they had stubbornly maintained their ground, and Paul had firmly insisted upon his demand, there would have been a dead-lock, and the apostle must have remained incarcerated for an indefinite period. In that case, while a few would have admired his firmness, the multitude would no doubt have esteemed him a stubborn fool and fanatic. The judges would have published throughout Philippi and the surrounding region, that his imprisonment was wholly due to his own obstinacy, and that he held the key of his cell in his own hand—an opinion in which all the Jewish rabbis would have heartily coincided.

But the 'dark,' first century differed from the 'enlightened' nineteenth; the 'despotic' Roman empire was not as the

‘free’ United States of America; ‘provincial’ Macedonia was not ‘keystone’ Pennsylvania, and the magistrates of Philippi were not Philadelphia judges. The authorities of the city had the good sense to be aware of their odious position, and the magnanimity to confess their wrong. They yielded to the indomitable Paal, being aided to that decision by knowing that a simple appeal to a higher court—such as in a subsequent case the apostle made to the emperor in person—would bring, if necessary, the whole power of the Roman empire to break down the prison door and vindicate the rights of the two oppressed citizens. Thus the dead-lock was avoided, and justice had its due; for it is written: “And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates; and they feared when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out and desired them to depart out of the city.”

This day beholds in our own land a case in all respects parallel, save, unfortunately, in the issue—a Christian in prison, condemned without trial and for no crime, and tendered a release only on conditions of dishonor and falsehood. The facts are so familiar to the public, that the briefest possible statement must suffice.

Mr. Passmore Williamson is a young man thirty four years of age, of good family, pleasing appearance and cultivated mind, resident in Philadelphia with his family, and associated in business, as a conveyancer, with his father. He is a professor of religion according to the forms and usages of the denomination of Friends, being connected with the meeting in Arch Street and esteemed one of the most valuable members. No man in Philadelphia stands higher for perfect integrity of character. Mr. Williamson has been for some time Secretary of a society chartered by the legislature of Pennsylvania in

1787, "to promote the abolition of slavery, the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African Race." Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush were among its first Presidents. It appears that about the middle of last July, Mr. John H. Wheeler undertook to carry three slaves (a mother and her two children) through Pennsylvania to New York. It has been decided in numerous cases, by Southern as well as Northern judges, that slavery is contrary to the law of nature, and can never have existence except in such locality as establishes it by positive legislation; and therefore, that if a master voluntarily brings his slave into a free state, the slave becomes instantly free. Mr. Wheeler knew this fact, had indeed been reminded of it before leaving the South, but chose to run the risk. When he reached Philadelphia, he kept a close watch upon the slave mother during the several hours of his delay; but she contrived to communicate with a person of her own color, who sent word to Mr. Williamson, as Secretary of a society whose duty it was to take notice of such cases. He at first referred the case to others, as he was much occupied with business; but as the boat for New York was to start in a few minutes with the slaves aboard, he changed his mind and hastened to the spot. There he found the slaves with Mr. Wheeler, and stepping up, peaceably informed the mother that by the laws of Pennsylvania she was entitled to her freedom. At the same time several colored men, who had also learned the facts, but who had no understanding whatever with Mr. Williamson, rushed up, took the slaves under their care, hurried them ashore, placed them in a carriage and drove off to parts unknown. Mr. Williamson handed his card to Mr. Wheeler and returned to his business. A day or two after he was served with a writ of *habeas corpus*, issued

by Judge Kane, of the United States District Court (without legal authority, as is now generally contended, the case being out of his jurisdiction,) requiring him to produce in court the bodies of the escaped woman and her two children. He appeared in court with his counsel and made written return, that the persons in question were not then nor had been at any previous time in his possession, or under his control. This was the exact truth, in letter and in spirit, for Mr. Williamson had no part in the arrangement by which they were conveyed away, and possessed no power, legal or otherwise, to compel their appearance. But Judge Kane, who seems to have acted entirely in the interest of Wheeler and of slavery, pretended that there was a conspiracy to abduct the negroes unlawfully (though all that was proved by the witnesses relied on to impeach the statement of Mr. Williamson, was merely that he and those who rescued the slaves came up about the same time and insisted on her right to freedom,) and that Mr. Williamson was a party to it, yea, the chief instigator and must therefore be considered in the eye of the law as having had possession of the slaves. The Judge, therefore, upon this technical and constructive ground, pronounced the return evasive and false, and a gross contempt of Court, and sentenced Mr. Williamson to imprisonment until he should make his peace with the Court by acknowledging the falsity of the return. Two months and a half have now elapsed, the Supreme Court of the State has refused to interfere to protect its own citizen from the tyranny of a Federal judge, and Mr. Williamson is the occupant of a cell. And there he must abide, perhaps for life, unless Judge Kane shall relent or he shall make humble submission to his oppressor.

Mr. Williamson cannot make the acknowledgement required by Judge Kane ; for three reasons : First, it would

be a falsehood. He stated only and exactly the truth. The slave-mother and her children became free the instant her master brought her across the boundary-line of Pennsylvania. She had a right to go whither she would. She went of her own accord with the colored men who took her in charge. Mr. Williamson, moreover, acted independently of them and simply informed the woman of her legal rights. She went whither she pleased and to a place unknown to him, and he returned to his usual business. For him, therefore, to acknowledge that the language of his written and affirmed return was untrue, would be to confess a falsehood for the sake of deliverance from prison.

Secondly, such a confession might avail only to insure a renewal of imprisonment under a heavier charge. His return was made with the solemnity of a legal affirmation, equivalent in law to an oath; so that a confession of its incorrectness would expose him to conviction for perjury. And Judge Kane implied as much, when the counsel of Williamson asked liberty on the spot, to amend the return by simply omitting the words 'nor at any other time,' and the Judge declared that he could not allow it, and that if he could and did, he should direct a prosecution to be instituted for perjury.

Then, thirdly, the case being a plain issue between the tyrannical slave-power acting through Judge Kane, and the rising spirit of liberty represented by Passmore Williamson, the latter can make no compromise without betraying the interests of freedom which God has providentially committed to his hands.

It will thus be seen, that it is no spirit of obstinacy, but a quiet and firm adherence to principle, which has induced Mr. Williamson to refuse any concession to the imperious Kane. He is only following in the steps of the noble Paul, who, though usually so forbearing, dared to stand upon his

rights at Philippi, and to be just as "impracticable" as the interests of truth demanded.

A similar instance occurred about twenty-five years since. The State of Georgia, in contravention of all right and in the face of repeated treaties of the United States, extended her laws over the territory of the Cherokee Indians then within her bounds, determining to expel them from the State. The missionaries of the American Board to that tribe were forbidden to prosecute their work. They refused obedience, were violently seized, and after trial sentenced to four years imprisonment. They appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, which decided in their favor and ordered their liberation. The authorities of Georgia defied the mandate, and the President of the United States was unwilling to enforce it. Meanwhile the prisoners were offered a pardon on certain conditions ; but they nobly replied, that they could make no compromise recognizing the illegal claims of Georgia, or implying any fault in their own proceedings. And there they lay in prison for eighteen months, until the Governor of Georgia issued a command for their liberation. For this courageous resistance to wrong, they were almost universally applauded, and the names of Worcester and Butler have become sacred in the memory of the friends of missions.

Yet for imitating this heroic example, with the calm fortitude of a Christian and a Quaker, Passmore Williamson is condemned as an obstinate, ambitious fanatic, by men who glorified the conduct of the Cherokee missionaries ! Yes, and Judge Black, when pronouncing the decision of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania adverse to the application of Mr. Williamson for a writ of *habeas corpus*, even so far descended from the dignity of his station, as to insult the applicant with these final and unfeel-

ing words : 'The petitioner, therefore, carries the key of his prison in his own pocket; he can come out when he will, by making terms with the Court that sent him there. But if he choose to struggle for triumph, if nothing will content him but a clean victory or a clean defeat, he cannot expect us to aid him. Our duties are of a widely different kind. They consist in discouraging, as much as in us lies, all such contest with the legal authorities of the country. The writ of *habeas corpus* is refused!'

Has not this been the language of judicial tyranny in all ages? Is there a word of it which might not have fallen from the magistrates of Philippi, if in the exercise of a false pride they had attempted to carry out their injustice towards Paul? Or, would not such a judge have received the applause of all Georgia, if he had announced a similar decision against Butler and Worcester? How easy it would have been in each of those cases, to say to the victims, "You carry the key of your prison in your own pocket. You can come out when you will, by making terms with the Court that incarcerated you." Yes, the key of falsehood and dishonor will no doubt open many prison-doors; but men of integrity, who fear God and respect their own character, will die rather than use it!

Having thus recited the material facts of the case, it is my purpose to notice some of the thoughts which will naturally suggest themselves to a Christian mind, and which you may have already silently anticipated.

1—The case of Passmore Williamson should in feeling and action be made our own. All the friends of liberty and Christianity should identify themselves with this experience of injustice, and that upon many important grounds. Christianity bids us sympathize with the woes of the oppressed every where, and nothing which concerns

human suffering, even in a single instance, in any, the most distant land, and for any cause, should be foreign to our feelings. But in this instance the victim is a fellow citizen, and his crime, a love of truth and justice. He has claims, then, upon our regard, as a man, as an American, as a philanthropist, and as an example of incorruptible integrity. Yea, more than this, he presents himself as a professed, and we may believe, a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ; not indeed a member of our denomination and subscribing to the particulars of our creed, but never-the-less a brother beloved by us and accepted of God, if he indeed put faith in Jesus, though he worship in the simplicity of Quakerism. True to the spirit of his sect and the chosen appellation of 'Friend;' true to the spirit of William Penn and the philanthropic name of the city of his residence; and what is more, true to the spirit of Christ and the noble name of Christian, he did his duty to the oppressed, and for his promptness therein is now made to suffer, under the flimsy pretext of a contempt of Court. The New Testament reads, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them who suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." "And if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. In obedience to these injunctions, we should identify ourselves with our suffering brother, as though we were called to bear the load of injustice. Our bosoms should glow with the same honest and manly indignation which would burn in our hearts had we been made the victims of similar judicial tyranny.

And the ground of our sympathy will appear yet more reasonable, if we remember, that it were an easy thing for us actually to occupy a similar cell. The blow fell upon him rather than another by a mere providence.

The same misconstruction of law imperils every other peaceable and humane citizen, and places his liberty at the discretion of any United States Judge. The most respectful answer which we should return to some writ, might by a mere technical, judicial quibble, and contrary to our habitual character and intended meaning, be tortured into a contempt of Court and be followed by imprisonment as perpetual as our adherence to truth. And the outward occasion might be, as in this case, a mere declaration to another of the law of the State and of the rights of an individual under it. The most honored citizen of this community, yea, the venerable ex-Chief Justice of this State, who might at the time have been led to Philadelphia, and who, being present on the boat, should have announced the plain law by which that mother and her two children were entitled to freedom, might have been subjected to the same unrighteous penalty. Passmore Williamson happened, in the Providence of God, to be the man who was called to the spot at the critical moment, and thus became the representative of every man of humanity, honor and truth. Give him, then, your full sympathy, as one who suffers for you as well for himself, and be not reluctant to make common cause with him before God and the world.

2—There should issue from every Christian mouth an indignant remonstrance against this glaring outrage upon the person of our brother. "The powers that be" are entitled to the respect, gratitude and support of every Christian, while they fulfill their duties as the ministers of justice; but there is no principle of religion which forbids an honest expression of indignation when justice is perverted and a magistrate becomes a tyrant. Never is an outrage so gross as when cloaked under the forms of law, thus assuming the guise of justice, and leaving the vic-

tim powerless by turning the hand of protection into that of persecution. Earnest was the appeal of the Psalmist unto God; "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood." Emphatic was the denunciation uttered by Isaiah; "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed, to turn aside the needy from judgment, (justice) and to take away the right from the poor of my people." Heavy was the accusation of Zephaniah, "Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves." God's people must never, indeed, be disorganizers and railers, but as little must they be heartless apologists or silent spectators of wrong. They must utter a courageous protest in the name of Christ and humanity. Thus the missionaries to the Cherokees said in one of their communications, "We wish certainly to avoid opprobrious language, but we cannot see why, when we have felt ourselves called upon to oppose a torrent of iniquity, we should attempt to gloss over that iniquity by giving it names too smooth to express the truth. And we feel unwilling to retire from the contest to which we have been led, without giving our decided testimony against what it is impossible for us to regard in any other light than *injustice, oppression and robbery.*"

Christians must be careful how "they speak evil of dignities;" yet it is evident, that law can be sacred only as it is synonymous with justice, and that there is no surer way to bring rulers into discredit, and to sap the very foundations of government, than to allow those who represent the law to perform deeds of oppression unrebuked. However guarded, therefore, we should be against

revenge, or factiousness, there ought to be a Christian sensibility which will utter a deep-toned and indignant remonstrance in the ear of every oppressor. Most fully do I endorse, (if my humble endorsement be needed,) the defense which the learned, pious, and high-souled Bunsen makes of Hyppolitus for his exposure, in the third century, of the crimes and heresies of Callistus, the bishop of Rome: "Since nothing human is perfect, I prefer good, strong indignation infinitely to an impotent indifference and to mawkish hypocrisy. The man who will not attack a falsehood, will not defend truth; and he who dares not call a knave a knave, (whether he be his bishop or brother bishop, or not,) will not treat tyranny as tyranny, when the cause of Christian truth is attacked by force. Yet it was for doing this, that the martyrs died, from Hippolytus to Ridley. Nor do I see how any man can speak too strongly, when he is defending truth against wickedness. * * * * Respect for authority is something; but respect for truth is more."

And here let me add, that Christians should not wait for men of the world to do the work of exposing and rebuking wickedness in high places. The heart of no one should throb with such earnest and lively indignation, the voice of no one utter so manly and prompt rebuke, as that of the Christian; for he acts ever upon principle and responds at once to the appeals of truth. In the present instance, there should have gone up from every church member in Philadelphia such a protest as would have absolved the church of Christ from all participancy in the crime and all suspicion of indifference to its perpetration. Every pulpit should have thundered its anathema against judicial tyranny. Every minister of Christ should have been filled with the spirit of Isaiah and Zephaniah, to denounce the wrath of God against all

who condemn the innocent, until the guilty Judge should have repented in sack-cloth and ashes, or have fled to some heathen city, where no Christian testimony was to be encountered. But alas ! the pulpits resounded only with theological disputations and the inculcation of abstract virtues. There may have been other instances—I trust there were—but the public prints have reported but a single witness for the truth among the numerous clergy of the city, and he, forsooth, a heretic ! Alas ! how will they answer at the solemn moment when Christ shall say, “I was in prison, and ye visited me not ?” Apathy and timidity, when vital principles are at stake, is a refusal to meet the foes of man and God ; is therefore treason to humanity and religion.

3—Christians should remember their imprisoned brother in prayer. Prayer is the peculiar weapon of the saint—other instrumentalities he uses in common with men of the world. As a citizen, he speaks, he writes, he prints, he votes ; but as a christian, he prays. Eighteen hundred years ago, a sacred historian wrote of a similar case of unrighteous imprisonment : “ Peter, therefore was kept in prison : but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” Those prayers of humble, believing hearts, opened the prison doors and delivered the apostle. May it not do as much again ! Human help is well nigh exhausted. The State Judges profess to be bound by legal etiquette never to go behind a case of alleged contempt, however baseless the charge or unlimited the penalty, or void of jurisdiction the Judge. Impeachment is a very uncertain and at best a very slow process. No orderly method promises present relief, and violence is not to be thought of. Is our brother therefore defenceless ? Not while God reigns ; not while Christians pray ; not while Christ intercedes. If united,

continuous and importunate prayer be offered in his behalf, his release will be effected. In what manner, we may not say, nor know, nor perhaps even suspect; for the resources of God are infinite. He may cause the heart of the Judge to relent, so that by a frank avowal of error, or by availing himself of some ingenious pretext, he may order the release of his victim. Or, if, like one of old, the oppressor should prove to be a 'Judge who feareth not God, neither regardeth man,' it were easy for God to secure his speedy removal from office through loss of reason or of life, and the appointment of a successor who would discharge the prisoner. It is neither necessary nor proper for us to pray with any attempt to anticipate the method of relief. But the case is one which calls upon those who have power in prayer to wrestle and prevail as did ancient Israel. In proportion as we are cut off from human aid, are we shut up the more plainly to prayer as our chief resource, and remember, my brethren, that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

4—Lastly, this occurrence should encourage us in our conflict with slavery. Many will regard this event as of a disheartening nature, tending to dampen the ardor and disappoint the hopes of the friends of the slave. I do not view it in that light. On the contrary, I regard it as an omen of success, and, in fact, as so clearly such, that I doubt not the same conviction will seize every mind that attentively ponders the following considerations.

First, the imprisonment of Passmore Williamson is a providential occurrence to instruct and arouse the American people. There has been hitherto gross ignorance combined with guilty apathy concerning the vast subject of American slavery. The people have been slow to discern its magnitude and to admit their own responsibility. They have deemed it a purely Southern and sectional question,

a vague subject of distant philanthropy. They have not understood its national usurpations and its universally corrupting influence. They have turned a deaf ear to those who warned them that all rights are equally sacred in whomsoever they may inhere; that to consent to the oppression of the black man is to destroy equally the liberty of the white man, as both must stand, if at all, on the common ground of their manhood; and that therefore slavery degrades all labor, endangers all the weak, undermines the foundations of all free government, and is antagonistic to the welfare of the entire nation. They have refused to believe, that as slavery is nothing in its incipency but a giant usurpation, in which all the rights of the slave are lost in the gain of the master, so it must as a system rule every interest with a despotic hand, and proceed in a career of usurpation, until it shall have entirely subjugated church and state, and brought the whole land to ruin. The multitude, by reason of ignorance and thoughtlessness, and the intelligent few, by reason of the blinding influence of immediate personal interest, are slow to receive and act upon abstract principles. Nothing but facts confronting them in daily life, will open their eyes to neglected truth. Therefore, it is, that God is allowing event after event to occur in our land, which shall illustrate the power of slavery in church and state and exhibit its true spirit and tendency. When a few more such deeds as the repeal of the Missouri compromise, the invasion of Kansas by the armed ruffians of Missouri, and the imprisonment of Passmore Williamson, have been done, we shall begin to understand that slavery has its hand upon the throat of freedom, and that one or the other must die. It is easy to believe in the corruption of men who lived and ruled in other lands and in ancient times: it is difficult to realize, that there is dereliction of principle in

those who bear rule now and here. It was well enough for Micah to say, twenty-five hundred years ago, "That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh and the judge asketh for a reward, and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire : so they wrap it up. The best of them is as a brier : the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge"—yes, that was a possible state of things then ; but to intimate that our Federal authorities, from the President in the White House and the United States Judges on their bench, to the veriest city Custom House officer and village Postmaster, are sold to the interests of slavery, is to excite a smile of incredulity. The arrival of history at the nineteenth century and the existence on paper of the Federal Constitution, are supposed to have obviated all liability to such corruption ! But here, amid our boasted religion and civilization, stand the crime and barbarism of slavery—a Christian and republican nation holding one seventh part of the entire population in bondage ! And here is the case of a man in a free State, of unblemished character, committing no crime, in fact only explaining the law of the State, ordered to appear and answer to a writ, which able lawyers declare that the Judge had no legal power to issue, making, however, a respectful and true answer, falsely charged with contempt of Court, refused permission to amend the return on the spot, denied a delay of action sufficient to enable him to find and procure witnesses in his defence, condemned to imprisonment without trial, without limitation of time and without power of appeal, at the decree of a single man, and he a judge to whom the prisoner is personally obnoxious, who endeavored not long since, against all law, but in the service of slavery, to construe a riot as treason, and who stands publicly charged with having suppressed, in his remarks at the time to the Grand Jury,

in quoting the article of the Constitution which defines treason, the most emphatic word in the sentence, and the one which contradicted, and was meant by its framers to contradict, the despotic doctrine which he was aiming to establish. If any United States Judge may thus take vengeance on an opponent of slavery, wherein are we better protected than the subjects of Austria, Russia or Turkey? It is well for such facts to come out, that we may be instructed concerning the power of slavery when it controls a free government. The case of Passmore Williamson will beget thought, and thought will beget action, and through his suffering that of the slave may be shortened, and the triumph of freedom and religion be secured.

Secondly, there is encouragement, because such an outrage marks the arrival of the anti-Slavery cause at the stage of progress which immediately precedes victory. Every student of history has noticed—what a study of human nature would indeed suggest *a priori*—that there are three periods marking the inception and progress of every cause. The first is the period of either neglect or ridicule, when the cause is in its infancy and attracts little attention, and that little in the way of contempt. It is either passed by in disdainful silence, or is noticed only to point a jest. The second period is that of active opposition, culminating in violent persecution. The enemy seems to respect the increasing strength of the cause and to fear its progress. Argument is resorted to, threats are employed, an earnest and perpetual antagonism is exhibited. It is felt that something decisive must be done to crush the rising party in Church and State. As its members still increase and indications are given that it will soon bring its power to bear, hostility rises to perfect hatred, and opposition becomes nerved with the energy of despair and breaks out into reckless deeds of outrage. Then

follows the third period, that of victory. The enemy seeing that violence fails to arrest the progress of the cause, withdraws dispirited from the contest and sullenly but certainly yields the field. Such was the experience of Christianity in the Roman empire. It was first despised, then persecuted, then embraced. Such is human nature, that every important change of opinion and practice must have three chapters in its history. The course of events shows, that the anti-slavery cause has reached the close of the second period, when opposition culminates in violent persecution. Were the apostle John again upon earth and in apocalyptic vision, he would hear as of old, a loud voice saying in heaven, "Wo to the inhabitants of earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." The anti-slavery cause, despite the ridicule which was at first heaped upon its advocates and their doctrines, and despite the arguments with which it was next met by learned divines, influential statesmen, and the scribbling army of religious and political editors, and despite the odium encountered by its friends, the loss of caste in church and State, and the occasional lessons of mob-law, has struggled upwards and overcome its foes, until it can no longer be laughed, or frowned, or beaten down. It has forced those who once sneered at the question whenever introduced, to confess that it is the greatest religious and political subject now before the nation. It has succeeded in creating a public sentiment and conscience at the North, which is fast bringing the social, literary, political and religious influence of the Free States to bear against the system. The South feels the pressure, and slavery knows that its hour of doom draws nigh. Unless a final and desperate struggle be made; unless all the resources of falsehood and

treachery, of the national government and party discipline, of secret fraud and open violence, of legal penalty and lawless bloodshed, be brought to bear in a successful effort to crush the friends of freedom; the chains of the slave will be broken, the oppressed will go free. Hence the disgraceful scenes which have been witnessed in all parts of our land within the last five years, in Congressional legislation, in decisions of United States Commissioners and Judges, in the array of military force to return fugitive bondmen, in an armed invasion of a territory of the United States and the forcible imposition of a legislature by the minions of slavery from a neighboring State, and in fines and imprisonments of the friends of freedom. These things show that the final battle is fast approaching, on the issue of which hangs not only the destiny of three millions slaves, but also of this great republic. We are either to be truly free, honestly and consistently Christian and democratic, or we are to become the abode of a vast slave oligarchy, the by-word of the world and a conspicuous mark for the bolts of divine wrath. And can you doubt, my hearers, to which side victory will incline? Do not the promises and prophecies of Scripture, the prayers of good men, the course of Providence, and the whole spirit of the age assure us, that freedom must triumph, that slavery must perish? The struggle may be fierce and protracted, but it can never be doubtful. "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Courage, then, ye who fight for God and liberty! Tremble not in the dark hour of human violence; it precedes the dawning of a glorious day. We know not how God may apportion the trials that are yet to be endured. Three months since, Passmore Williamson little dreamed of a prison. God may reserve similar or worse suffering

for some of us in the conflict with American despotism, armed, as it now is, with all the official power of the nation. One of our beloved members, not long since, wore out three weary years and a half in a Missouri prison, for sympathy with the slave; and God may put a similar honor yet upon many others. If so, we will endeavor in the strength of Christ, to imitate the noble example of him, who, in silent submission, bows to the burden which God hath laid upon him, nor wishes it were lighter.

“Oh! for thy spirit, tried and true,
And constant in the hour of trial,
Prepared to suffer or to do,
In weakness and in self denial.

“Unwearying in the Truth’s defence
Even where the fires of Hate are burning,
Th’ unquailing eye of innocence
Alone upon the oppressor turning.”